



The New Phrenology: The Limits of Localizing Cognitive Processes in the Brain (Life and Mind: Philosophical Issues in Biology and Psychology)

William R. Uttal

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William Uttal is concerned that in an effort to prove itself a hard science, psychology may have thrown away one of its most important methodological tools—a critical analysis of the fundamental assumptions that underlie day-to-day empirical research. In this book Uttal addresses the question of localization: whether psychological processes can be defined and isolated in a way that permits them to be associated with particular brain regions.

New, noninvasive imaging technologies allow us to observe the brain while it is actively engaged in mental activities. Uttal cautions, however, that the excitement of these new research tools can lead to a neuroreductionist wild goose chase. With more and more cognitive neuroscientific data forthcoming, it becomes critical to question their limitations as well as their potential. Uttal reviews the history of localization theory, presents the difficulties of defining cognitive processes, and examines the conceptual and technical difficulties that should make us cautious about falling victim to what may be a "neo-phrenological" fad.

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